

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 28, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write you today as a bipartisan group of lawmakers from Nevada to express our concerns about the overwhelming constituent outreach to our offices on severe delays and complications experienced during passport application and renewal processes. We recognize these issues have been felt nationally, and we are committed to supporting the State Department in improving passport processing broadly. However, we would draw your attention to the specific difficulties Nevada residents face when seeking a passport and ask you to consider solutions to better support our constituents, including by opening a passport agency in our state.

Far too many Nevadans have come to our offices for help with unreasonable delays and difficulties during passport renewals and applications, including long hold times on the customer service line, after which they often received misleading information. Since the start of 2023, the caseworkers in our offices have received 1,138 queries on passport processing difficulties—roughly 163 per month. We have regularly heard from constituents who have waited much longer than the maximum 13 weeks advertised on the Department of State website, desperately seeking help from our offices as long-planned travel dates creep up and threaten to pass them by.

The passport issues impacting Nevadans are driven in part by a dramatic increase in demand for passports nationwide—up 30 to 40% above last year, by your own estimate—which the State Department has struggled to keep up with, and which shows no sign of slowing.¹ We recognize that this is a national issue that requires serious attention, and we remain committed to working with you, the Bureau of Consular Affairs, and colleagues from both parties to seek long-term solutions to this nationwide shortfall in passport processing capacity.

However, we ask that you consider the unique passport difficulties we have observed in our state, particularly in Clark County. The largest county in Nevada, Clark County includes the state's largest city, Las Vegas, and is home to nearly three-fourths of its population, with an estimated 2.3 million people.² Famously a travel hub, the Las Vegas metropolitan area boasts a vibrant population with ties all across the globe, including many residents keen to take full advantage of Harry Reid International Airport (LAS) to visit their family and friends abroad.

The large, and mounting, demand for international travel at LAS drives home the need for special attention to passport difficulties in Nevada. After the COVID-19 pandemic, international travel has surged back in full force, with the Las Vegas airport providing direct service to and from many foreign destinations across Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. LAS bounced back from the pandemic faster than most other airports, breaking an all-time passenger record in

2022, and its number of international passengers spiked by 234.9 percent to a total of 2.5 million that year. Three new carriers have begun service at LAS in anticipation of increased large-scale events on the horizon in our state—including the Formula One Las Vegas Grand Prix in November 2023 and Super Bowl LVIII in February of 2024. Las Vegas's regular large-scale events, booming international tourism sector, and increasingly active airport mean that the already significant demand for global travel from Nevada only stands to increase going forward.³

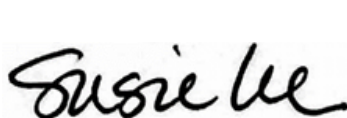
As our many constituents seeking to travel have wrestled with today's severe passport delays, they have emphasized that their difficulties have been exacerbated by the fact that the closest passport agency is in Los Angeles, CA. This means that after patiently awaiting the arrival of their passport, Nevadans confronted by unexpected delays must drive at least four hours one way for an emergency passport appointment—that is, when they are even able to secure one amid today's extremely high demand. This is not a sustainable system for a global city like Las Vegas or a population with such great demand for consular support.

For these reasons, we request that you examine the demand for passports across Nevada and consider opening a passport agency in our state to better meet our residents' travel needs. A view of the United States' passport agency map demonstrates a clear gap across the Western states, reflective of the great need for an agency in the Las Vegas area to provide much-needed passport assistance and to facilitate the emergency passport renewal requests our staffs are ever more frequently encountering. With the 24 passport agencies across the country mostly concentrated in the Northeast and on the coasts, it is past time for a new passport agency in Nevada.⁴

As you know, the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act included a provision that sought to address this issue by requiring a review of the geographic diversity of passport agencies, with an eye towards improving accessibility for large population centers without agencies. We appreciate your work in carrying out this review, as well as your attention to the Las Vegas metropolitan area, which clearly fits the provision's focus on high demand areas without in-person passport processing options. We look forward to further discussion with you about this review and your investigation into the evident demand for a passport agency in Nevada.

On behalf of all our constituents struggling with passport processing delays, frustrated by the lack of emergency assistance available, we thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to receiving your reply and to discussing a path forward with you soon.

Sincerely,



Susie Lee
Member of Congress



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



Mark Amodei
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/23/politics/blinden-state-department-passport-delays/index.html>

² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/clarkcountynevada/PST045222>

³ [Reid Airport breaks all-time passenger record, servicing 52.6 million in 2022 – The Nevada Independent](#); [Las Vegas airport passenger traffic highest ever in 2022 | Las Vegas Review-Journal \(reviewjournal.com\)](#); <https://www.traveldailynews.com/column/featured-articles/is-las-vegas-still-the-entertainment-capital-of-the-world-in->

⁴ <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/get-fast/passport-agencies.html>